

STATEMENT OF BRIAN O'NEILL, GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT, GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE, DRUG POLICY AND HUMAN RESOURCES OF THE HOUSE GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMITTEE, AT AN OVERSIGHT HEARING ON NATIONAL PARKS OF CALIFORNIA

November 28, 2005

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today at this oversight hearing on key issues facing national parks in California with particular attention to national recreation areas, state and Federal management of park units, and Yosemite National Park. We are pleased to welcome you to the San Francisco Bay Area.

The 24 units of the National Park System in California make up nearly half the total number of units managed by the Pacific West Region and are organized among five different regional networks. These units, and the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail that we also manage, reflect the vast diversity in landscape, history, and culture that characterizes the Golden State. They range from large, popular, traditional national parks such as Yosemite, Sequoia, and Kings Canyon to lesser-known historic sites such as the Japanese American internment camp at Manzanar; from the complex collections of natural and cultural resources in metropolitan areas at Golden Gate and Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Areas to the remote desert parks at Death Valley, Mojave, and Joshua Tree.

The NPS units in California include: Cabrillo National Monument, which memorializes the explorer who claimed the west coast for Spain in 1542; Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front National Historical Park, which commemorates the home front contributions to the war effort and the women and minorities who broke new ground in employment practices; Pinnacles National Monument, with its spire-like rock formations as high as 1,200 feet; John Muir National Historic Site, home of the celebrated conservationist; Lassen Volcanic National Park, with its boiling springs, mud pots, and sulfurous vents; San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, with its examples of the 19th Century sailing vessels used in the Bay Area; and Channel Islands National Park, whose five islands preserve a large variety of plant and animal life. The remaining national park units in California also contribute to the preservation of natural, cultural, and historical resources that are nationally significant.

National park units in California received about \$120 million in operations and maintenance funding in FY 2005, an increase of about 6 percent from FY 2004. As is the case throughout the National Park System, parks in California are funded from several different sources, in addition to their operating budgets, to help carry out their mission. Many receive cyclic maintenance funds, which are distributed by the regional office, and some have construction and land acquisition funds, which are designated for individual parks in appropriations. Parks also collect concessions fees, transportation fees, and recreation fees. For FY 2005, California parks received about \$19 million from the 80 percent portion of recreation fees that individual parks retain, which will be used mostly for structural projects that benefit visitors. In addition, California parks have been given a great deal of financial and in-kind support from cooperating

associations, friends' groups, and other partnership entities. Many California parks benefit tremendously from the work done by volunteers, which increased nationwide by 14 percent in 2004.

As requested, this testimony is focused on national recreation areas, state and Federal management of park units, and Yosemite National Park. We have two urban national recreation areas - Golden Gate in San Francisco, and Santa Monica Mountains in Los Angeles - that work in close cooperation with State entities and others, and one park, Redwood National Park, that is a model of joint Federal-State management. Partly because these three units have large amounts of non-Federal land within their boundaries, they have close management relationships with state park agencies and others. Yosemite, on the other hand, is typical of older, traditional national parks in that almost all of the land within its boundaries is owned by the Federal government and administered by the National Park Service. But Yosemite, like the other units, works closely in partnership with many public and private entities that support the park's mission and our commitment to provide for visitor enjoyment.

Yosemite was established as a national park in 1890. Its history as a protected area dates to 1864, when the Federal government granted Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Big Tree Grove to the State of California, which later returned those areas to the Federal government. The park's famous landscape of granite peaks and domes, tall waterfalls, and groves of giant sequoias, draws more than 3.4 million visitors annually.

In addition to the complex operational challenges that any large national park faces, Yosemite also has the daunting mission of rebuilding much of the infrastructure in Yosemite Valley due to extensive damage from the 1997 flood, and undertaking this effort in a manner that maximizes the protection of resources and visitor enjoyment. Congress appropriated \$197 million for reconstruction immediately following the flood. The NPS was able to spend \$147 million of this funding prior to this year. The remaining funds have not yet been expended due to the extensive planning required for the reconstruction and lawsuits that delayed implementation of plans. Currently, the largest of the flood recovery projects, including visitor lodging, campgrounds, and employee housing, are underway.

In addition to the investment of federal funds in infrastructure improvement, the park has worked closely with public and private partners for additional funds and services. For example, The Yosemite Fund, the principal non-profit organization, contributed \$12 million toward the recently completed renovation of visitor access to the Lower Yosemite Fall area, one of the park's most popular attractions. Several years ago, The Yosemite Fund provided the funding for a visitor center at Glacier Point, where visitors enjoy spectacular views of Yosemite Valley and the high country. For the last few years, Yosemite has partnered with gateway communities in the operation of a regional transportation system.

Golden Gate National Recreation Area was established in 1972 to preserve, interpret, and enable the public to enjoy the wealth of historic, scenic, and recreational resources in the San Francisco metropolitan area. Within Golden Gate, the NPS manages beaches, redwood forests, a full array of military properties, an internationally recognized cultural center at Fort Mason, and the infamous Alcatraz Island. Encompassing a large expanse of land (about 75,000 acres) in an

urban area, where more than half the land within the park boundaries are owned by other entities, Golden Gate is a rare type of National Park System unit. In a location where it serves local and visiting populations, its sites draw 13.6 million people, far more than the average national park. It also attracts a huge number of volunteers (over 15,000 in FY 2005), has many programs geared toward diverse communities and youth, and leverages extensive financial support from non-Federal sources.

A large proportion of the non-Federal funding Golden Gate receives is due to the fact that the recreation area has one of the most active partnership operations in the entire National Park System. The recreation area leverages 80 cents for every dollar in appropriated funds. One of the recreation area's oldest partnerships is with the Fort Mason Foundation, which operates a center at the former U.S. Army facility that houses many non-profit organizations and conference facilities, as well as the famous Greens Restaurant. Just this month, following the expiration of previous cooperative agreements, the Foundation signed a 60-year lease with the NPS that will allow the Foundation, for the first time, to seek commercial loans for long-term capital improvements, including seismic refitting, and other long-term maintenance.

The NPS has forged an extraordinary partnership with the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. Among other projects, the Conservancy headed the fundraising effort for restoration of Crissy Field, located on the waterfront of the Presidio in one of the most heavily visited areas of San Francisco. Crissy Field was a fenced-in hazardous materials site in the 1980's and 1990's; it is now a very popular shoreline park and wetlands habitat. Not only did private funding pay for the restoration, but thousands of volunteers, including school children, donated countless hours cultivating native plants and placing them in and around Crissy Field's restored dunes and tidal marsh. The Crissy Field project has been heralded nationally as a model of partnership and received many national awards.

Within Golden Gate's boundaries are four state parks--Angel Island, Mount Tamalpais, and Samuel T. Taylor and Thornton Beach—that the state operates without formal involvement from the NPS. However, the NPS has been involved in helping the state with restoration of the immigration station at Angel Island, often referred to as the “Ellis Island of the West.” Since 1997, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, the NPS, and the non-profit Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation have had a three-party agreement to work together to preserve and restore the former immigration station at Angel Island. The NPS has provided a considerable amount of different types of technical assistance to the state at the site.

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, like Golden Gate, was established largely to protect the scenic and recreational resources of the Santa Monica Mountains for the enjoyment of Los Angeles area residents and visitors alike. The Santa Monica Mountains boundary encompasses about 155,000 acres of land, although only about one-fifth of that land is managed by the NPS. About 530,000 people visit the NPS-managed sites annually, and millions more visit the three state parks, several state and county beaches, and other attractions within the boundaries of the Santa Monica Mountains.

From the time the park was authorized in 1978, the NPS has worked closely with the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (a state

resources agency) to coordinate land protection strategies and visitor use activities. More recently, the NPS has entered into a cooperative management agreement with the two state entities for the joint management of public parklands. The agreement provides for the exchange of goods and services to achieve greater operational efficiencies. Last year, cooperative management activities generated over \$850,000 in cost savings to all three agencies. During the past year, the agencies launched a new recreation transit system, called ParkLINK, to increase access to parks from inner-city communities in Greater Los Angeles. The NPS provided approximately \$1 million for capital investments while the state provided over \$300,000 to operate and maintain this system.

The NPS, California Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy also worked together in recent years to acquire the historic King Gillette Ranch in the heart of the recreation area. This effort came to fruition last April, when the three entities and a host of other public and private entities purchased the property. The facility will be jointly administered by the NPS and the state agencies as a one-stop information center for visitors to all the Federal, state, and local parklands within the recreation area. Co-locating resources at this central location will allow the NPS and the state agencies to close the existing disconnected information facilities.

Point Reyes National Seashore, authorized in 1962, is another San Francisco Bay Area unit with some of the same characteristics as Santa Monica Mountains and Golden Gate. Like those two units, Point Reyes is located in a metropolitan area and contains coastal resources; its 2.1 million annual visitors are mostly day-use beachgoers. Unlike the two national recreation areas, the majority of the 71,000 acres of land within the boundary is owned and managed by the NPS and in that sense is more of a traditional national park unit.

Point Reyes has a particularly strong focus on natural resource protection. For the nine park units that make up the Pacific West Region's San Francisco Area Network, Point Reyes has the lead role in implementing the Natural Resource Challenge, the major effort the NPS has been engaged in during the last several years to improve the management of natural resources under its care. Because of needs identified by the NPS science advisors and resource managers at Point Reyes, we are seeing cutting-edge discoveries and methodologies there and at other parks in the network.

Facilitating this work has been the Pacific Coast Science and Learning Center, the San Francisco Area Network's premier park laboratory, which was established at Point Reyes a few years ago. This center, which is housed in a converted ranch house owned by the NPS, is used by visiting scientists and has become a leading example of what the Natural Resource Challenge was intended to accomplish. Through partnerships between the NPS and universities, students conduct the studies the NPS needs, which give them the opportunity to fulfill degree requirements while providing the parks with needed scientific research. The learning center currently has 80 projects underway, and 99 percent of the cost of those projects is being financed by entities other than the NPS.

Redwood National Park, in Northern California, protects California's coastal redwood forests, which include some of the tallest trees in the world. As a park encompassing superb natural and

cultural resources in a relatively remote location, Redwood National Park largely fits the model of a traditional national park. But the park is unusual from a management perspective because land within the boundary is jointly managed by the NPS and the California Department of Parks and Recreation. Of the 106,000 acres within the boundary, about one-third of the land base consists of state park lands. Yet management of the Federal and state lands within the boundary is so seamless that visitors are hardly aware of the different ownership.

The Federal-state management arrangement at Redwood, which has been formalized through a cooperative management agreement, stems from the origins of the park. The 1968 legislation that established Redwood National Park and the 1978 legislation that expanded it included three existing state parks within the boundary in anticipation of their eventual conveyance from the state to the NPS. For a variety of reasons, that conveyance did not occur. In the 1990's, the NPS and the California Department of Parks and Recreation established a framework for cooperative management of the Federal and state parks. Congress provided specific authority for the NPS to enter into a cooperative agreement for that purpose—and, after observing its successful use at Redwood, extended this authority to all units of the National Park System. That extension of authority is what has enabled the NPS to enter into the same type of cooperative management agreement at Santa Monica Mountains.

Under the Redwood cooperative management agreement, the NPS and the California Department of Parks and Recreation are guided by a joint General Plan/Management Plan, adopted in 2000. The two agencies share staff, equipment, and facilities to fulfill common resource protection and visitor service goals. They develop common procedures for activities such as issuing special use permits, and common programs for park operations such as staff training and media relations. They develop and implement schedules so that the two agencies cover for each other and avoid duplication. Both agencies benefit from efficiencies in the areas of law enforcement, interpretation, administration, resource management, and maintenance.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my statement, and I will be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.